



November 2009

# **ZOOM**

## **IN ON THE USA**

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## THANKSGIVING

One of the most important holidays celebrated in the United States is Thanksgiving. The celebration has its roots in the very beginnings of the first settlement by the English Pilgrims in the New World. The Pilgrims arrived to a land inhabited by American Indians and called their settlement Plymouth (present-day Massachusetts.) They found what they were looking for - religious freedom, but they could all have died of starvation soon upon their arrival. In fact, during the first winter half of the colonists died. Unfamiliar with growing crops or hunting in new circumstances, they would not have survived the next winter of 1621 except for the help of the native inhabitants of the land.

Wampanoag Indians had been living in the area for many centuries before. They lived in harmony with nature taking only what was necessary, respecting plants and animals

whom they treated as their relatives. They could efficiently grow corn and other crops, hunt and fish. They knew that before winter settles in for good, after the first severe frosts of fall, there is a time of warm and mild weather, the time for harvest, now known as "Indian summer." Seeing that the English settlers could not cope with filling their food stores for winter, they taught them. In this way they saved their lives. With corn, barley, beans and pumpkins in plentiful supply, the settlers no longer feared starvation.

The First Thanksgiving feast thrown by the Pilgrims for their benefactors, the Wampanoag people, was a three-day event celebrating a bountiful harvest. Wampanoag Indians brought deer and the Pilgrims provided fowl (probably turkey), seafood, vegetables, fruit and nuts.





# THANKSGIVING'S TRADITIONS

## Family Comes First

Thanksgiving is a family event, perhaps more than any other holiday in the United States. After a full morning of preparing the meal, the whole family gathers around the table. Religious families begin the meal by saying grace, i.e. a prayer said before or after a meal. This is not surprising considering the fact that the original Thanksgiving was a religious holiday. After the meal, a TV set is switched on in many households as there has been a long tradition to watch American football on that day. The tradition known as the Thanksgiving Classic was established by the National Football League which has played games on Thanksgiving every year since its creation. Since 1934, the Detroit Lions have hosted a game every Thanksgiving Day. College football teams also choose the day to play their last game of the season. For those who have the next day off the Thanksgiving Day and the following weekend are an ideal time for a pleasure trip. Therefore, the time around the fourth Thursday of November each year is also one of the busiest travel periods in the United States.

The dinner finished and the football game watched, a lot of Americans feel very sleepy. Popular thinking attributes this sleepiness to an amino acid contained in turkey. Most probably, however, it is caused by eating a little too much, and fatigue from all the preparations to Thanksgiving dinner.



Photo © AP Images

## On the Table at Thanksgiving

The staple menu for Thanksgiving dinner includes roast turkey with stuffing and gravy, mashed and sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce

and pumpkin or pecan pie. Hundreds of recipes exist for each of these foods, and most households are faithful to family recipes handed down from generation to generation. Of over 270 million turkeys raised in the U.S. last year, about 46 million were eaten at Thanksgiving. Since 1947, the National Turkey Federation has presented the President of the United States with a live turkey. He pardons the bird so that it does not end on anyone's plate, rather it is sent to Disneyland to live there for the rest of its years.

Vegetarians are not left out. Thanksgiving recipes for delicacies such as butternut squash, mushroom lasagna, Brussels sprouts with white beans, green beans and walnuts, cornbread casserole with butternut squash and mushrooms will leave them satisfied.

To give Thanksgiving dinner its due splendor it is important to decorate the house appropriately for the event. Decorative ornaments look best in the colors and materials of fall. Wreaths hung on the door invite guests. They are often home-made with greens from the garden, berries, juniper, lemon leaves, cinnamon sticks, and even fresh oranges or apples. Decorations for the table are also important. Dried or fresh leaves can serve as placecards while branches with colorful leaves make great centerpieces.



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## Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

Since 1924, with the exception of a three-year break caused by World War II, an American chain of department stores - Macy's - has organized a huge Thanksgiving Parade in New York. The first one in 1924, known as the Christmas Parade, turned out to be a huge success. Animals from the Central Park Zoo starred in it. With the passing of years the parade changed: animals were withdrawn, balloons, then floats, and 'falloons' (balloons on floats) were introduced. In 1927 balloons with return addresses were released above New York. Whoever found the label with the address was entitled to an award at the Macy's store. Today, giant, inflated balloons feature characters known from cartoons. In 1934, the first Mickey Mouse balloon was introduced. The winner, however, is Snoopy, who has appeared in the most parades. Macy's Thanksgiving Parade is a very popular event. It draws crowds of over 3 million spectators lining the streets and 44 million watch it on TV.

## Thanksgiving's Crucial Dates

The first Thanksgiving feast took place in the fall of **1621**. In **1789**, 168 years later, on the initiative of Congressman Elias Boudinot of Burlington, New Jersey, the first American President, George Washington, signed a Thanksgiving Proclamation. However, it took another 74 years for Thanksgiving to become a federal holiday. In the midst of one of the bleakest times in the history of the United States, the American Civil War, in **1863** President Abraham Lincoln decided that on the last Thursday of each November Americans throughout the country should give thanks for all the good things that happened to them. Finally, in **1941** a congressional resolution moved the holiday to the fourth Thursday of November. That was done to exclude Thanksgiving occasionally taking place on the fifth Thursday, when November happened to have 5 Thursdays. The United States and Canada (where Thanksgiving is celebrated on the second Monday of October) are the only two countries in which Thanksgiving is a holiday.



[Click to listen](#)



Photo © AP Images



# THANKSGIVING'S TRADITIONS



Enactment of cooking at Plymouth Plantation back in 1620s Photo © AP Images

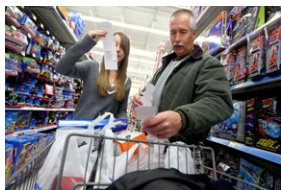


Photo © AP Images

## Black Friday

Those who have not gone on a trip are likely to spend the Friday after Thanksgiving spending ... money in shops. This day is called Black Friday and is the first day of the Christmas shopping season. Shops open as early as 5 a.m. and some invite customers even at midnight. The name "Black Friday" may have its roots in the financial crisis of 1869 or be an expression first used by the police to describe the heavy traffic in Philadelphia. Making a reference to colors, and considering the amount of dollars left at store registers by customers, it would perhaps be more appropriate to call the day "Green Friday."



Anne Barneby Recommends:

## Two Thanksgiving's Dishes

### Cream of Butternut Squash & Apple Soup (for 12)

3 T (tablespoons) unsalted butter, 1 onion, chopped, 1 medium butternut squash, about 3 lbs, peeled, seeded

and cut into 1-inch cubes, 6 cups chicken broth, 4 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and chopped, 4 pinches of Spanish saffron threads, pinch of freshly ground nutmeg, 2 cups heavy cream, salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste.

Melt butter. Add onion and sauté 4-6 minutes. Add squash and broth. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to medium-low. Simmer about 20 minutes. Add apples, saffron and nutmeg and simmer another 15 minutes. Purée soup in food processor or blender in batches until smooth. Return soup to pot and stir in cream. Season with salt and pepper. Warm gently as needed.

*based on a recipe from Gourmet magazine November '86.*

## Root Vegetable Purée (for 10)

3 lbs boiling potatoes, 1 ½ lbs turnips, peeled & cut into ½ inch pieces ¾ lb carrots, sliced thin ¾ stick, (6 T) unsalted butter, 1/3 cup heavy cream or skim milk.

Boil potatoes. Steam carrots & turnips (covered 15 min.) & purée. Add butter & carrot & turnip purée & season with salt & pepper. Stir in cream or skim milk. Then bake in 350 degree Fahrenheit oven till top is a little browned.

*based on a recipe from Williams-Sonoma (recipe courtesy of The Inn at Saw Mill Farm in West Dover, Vermont.)*

# ACTIVITY PAGE

**Win a Prize!**  
**November 2009**  
**CONTEST**

**Who did the first  
English settlers thank  
through the first  
Thanksgiving feast?**

**Send the answer (with  
your home address) to:**  
[madridIRC@state.gov](mailto:madridIRC@state.gov)

**Deadline: December 30**

**Win a Prize!**

**The answer in the  
October contest was:  
Talking birds such as  
parrots, etc.**

**Thank you for  
participating**

# ZOOM

**IN ON THE USA**

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### Exercise 1

Our intonation, or the way we say things, communicates more than the words themselves. It can express our emotions or sometimes change the meaning of the words completely. Listen to the speaker and decide what she really expresses by saying the two words "thank you" in various ways:

genuine gratitude, dismissal, indifference, enthusiasm, irritation, disapproval.



[Click to listen](#)

**Exercise 2** Now write the context that would explain what the speaker intends to say and read your sentences aloud. See if other students can guess the context.

example: That will be all, Mr. Smith,  
thank you.



[Click to listen](#)

**Exercise 3** There are many ways in which we can respond to someone's thanks. Here are some examples:

1. Not at all.
2. Certainly.
3. My pleasure.
4. It was nothing.
5. Don't mention it
6. You're welcome.
7. You are most certainly welcome.
8. Any time.
9. Well, thank **you**.
10. But of course.

Now decide which of the above expressions are formal and which are informal.

Practice saying "thank you" and responding to it with another student.

**Exercise 4** In the picture you can see some ingredients needed for one of the dishes recommended by Anne on p. 3. What are these ingredients? Do you remember what other ingredients are needed to make this dish?

Now think of a dish - easy or sophisticated - that you can make. Tell the other student how to prepare it.

### Exercise 5 Two writing tasks:

1. You spent a lovely weekend in your friends' house. Write a thank-you letter (or e-mail) thanking them for their hospitality.

2. You have received an invitation from your boss to a party. Unfortunately, you cannot come. Write to your boss a polite refusal explaining the reasons why you will not attend.

## Glossary

(in the order of appearance)

efficient - achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort

benefactor - a person who gives help or money to a person or cause

bountiful - large in quantity

fatigue - extreme tiredness

gravy - the fat and juices are usually called "drippings" and then gravy is made by mixing flour into the drippings and cooking until it thickens

pecan - a smooth brown nut with an edible kernel similar to a walnut

butternut squash - a bell-shaped fruit with sweet orange-yellow flesh

casserole - a kind of stew that is cooked slowly in an oven

centerpiece - a decorative piece or display placed in the middle of a dining table

seeded - having had the seeds removed

cored - having had the central tough part removed

(from *The New Oxford American Dictionary*)

